



Faith- and Character-Based Prison Initiative Yields Institutional Benefits; Effect on Recidivism Modest

at a glance

Florida's faith- and character-based initiative is a volunteer-staffed program that offers religious and life skills programs in 11 Florida prisons. Inmate participation is voluntary and inmates of any faith are eligible. No state funds are expended on the initiative.

The initiative operates prison-wide in four correctional institutions and in specified dorms in seven institutions. The prison-wide programs have a demonstrated positive effect on inmate institutional adjustment and institutional security, and a modest but positive effect on reducing the likelihood that inmates will reoffend. The dorm-based programs also have a positive effect on institutional adjustment and security; however, they do not have a demonstrated effect on inmate recidivism.

The department has encountered several challenges managing the dorm-based programs, including limitations in providing inmates with religious diversity and underutilization of some prison dorms.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, this report examines Florida's faith-based initiative and addresses three questions.

- What are the characteristics of Florida's faith- and character-based prison initiative?

- What are the demonstrated outcomes of the faith- and character-based initiative?
- What challenges has Florida's faith- and character-based prison initiative encountered?

Background

Faith- and character-based programs are prison rehabilitative programs intended to change inmates' internal motivations and thereby alter their behavior. Florida is one of 19 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons that offer faith-based prison programs.

Questions and Answers –

What are the characteristics of Florida's faith- and character-based prison initiative?

The initiative is a volunteer-staffed program that offers a variety of faith- and character-based education programs to inmates. Florida's initiative operates prison-wide in four correctional institutions and in designated dorms in seven institutions. Inmate participation is voluntary and inmates of any faith are eligible. The initiative is decentralized and program offerings vary by prison location. No state funds are expended on the initiative.

Florida's faith- and character-based initiative has five primary characteristics

The initiative is intended to provide an environment that facilitates inmate transformation through volunteer-led programs and religious study and services. The initiative has five distinguishing elements.

- **An inmate's religious faith, or lack thereof, is not considered in determining eligibility.** Neither religious preference nor participation in chapel programs is considered in eligibility decisions.
- **Inmate participation is completely voluntary.** Inmates wishing to participate in the initiative must sign a form requesting placement in a prison-wide program or a designated dorm. Inmate selection is conducted by the Department of Correction's classification staff at its central office. Any inmate wishing to leave a faith-based placement is generally transferred within one week.
- **The initiative seeks to offer a full range of religious accommodation.** Florida law requires the department to develop linkages with churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based institutions and to ensure there is no attempt to convert an offender to a particular faith or religious preference.
- **State funds are not expended on religious programming or materials.** All programs are volunteer-led and all materials are donated. The department has established safeguards to ensure that state funds are not spent for this purpose.
- **Each program is autonomous.** The programs are coordinated by chaplains who report to the warden rather than the head of chaplaincy at the central office. Program composition is left to the discretion of individual chaplains and prison wardens. The course offerings, content, and presentation are not standard or centralized and vary by location.

The initiative is offered through prison-wide programs and in specified dorms

The department provides faith- and character-based programs in two settings. First, the department operates four prisons in which the programs are offered to all inmates institution-wide. Second, it operates faith-based self-improvement dorms at seven prisons which offer the programs only to inmates living within the specified dorm in the prison compound.

Faith- and character-based institutions are prisons where the initiative is offered to all inmates and the programs have been incorporated into the facility's mission. These institutions are considered a permanent placement and the length of time an inmate can stay is open-ended. Three of the faith- and character-based prisons house male inmates while the fourth houses female inmates.

These prisons offer a range of programs that inmates can choose among based on their religious preference and personal interest. The programs include Bible study groups, Spanish-language worship, Native American prayer, and parenting skills and yoga classes. Inmates are required to participate in one program a month, equivalent to one hour of programming per week. Many inmates participate in multiple programs, a practice encouraged by staff.

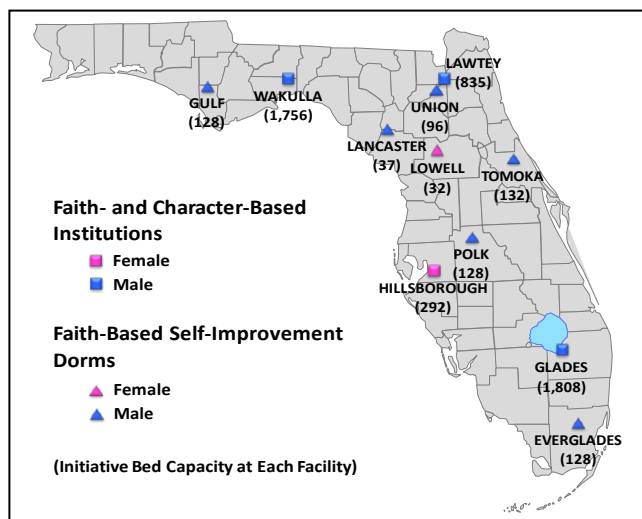
Faith-based/self-improvement dorms are housing units within regular prisons where the initiative has been established as an enclave community within the prison compound. These dorms are 12-month programs. Section 944.803(3), *Florida Statutes*, require that 80% of inmates assigned to these dorms be within 36 months of release. Inmates in dorm-based programs must participate in all required programs. For example, inmates participating in the dorm program at Tomoka Correctional Institution have six hours of required programming per week.

The programs serve over 5,300 inmates. As shown in Exhibit 1, the overall initiative has a capacity of approximately 5,300 inmates, with 94% of the slots for male participants. These

include 4,691 slots within the faith- and character-based institutions and 681 slots in the faith-based/self-improvement dorms.¹ The number of inmates with pending requests for placement in these programs is sizable, with 8,890 inmates on the waiting list for the institution-based programs and 1,600 for the dorm-based programs.

Exhibit 1

Florida’s Faith-Based Correctional Initiative Is Offered in Four Institutions and Seven Dorms



Source: OPPAGA.

What are the demonstrated outcomes of the faith- and character-based initiative?

The initiative has demonstrated positive effects on inmate institutional adjustment and prison security and a modest but positive impact on inmate recidivism. The initiative also has generated significant volunteer resources for the department.

The faith- and character-based initiative has produced several positive outcomes

The initiative has demonstrated several positive outcomes. Both inmates and department staff

report that it has improved prison safety. Inmates in these programs have fewer disciplinary reports, a fact which suggests that the initiative improves prison safety. There have been fewer contraband seizures and positive drug tests in prisons served by the initiative, and inmates served by the prison-wide initiative have shown somewhat lower recidivism compared to similar inmates. The initiative also has generated significant volunteer support for the department’s programs.

Prison-wide programs have improved institutional safety. Both department staff and inmates report that the initiative has generated a positive effect on the institutional environment. Most inmates we spoke with stated that the initiative has improved their lives in prison, helping them overcome destructive habits and adopt a more positive outlook. Department staff generally reported that the initiative has a positive effect on facility management including facilitating inmate adjustment to prison life, encouraging personal accountability, and providing structure to leisure time.

Both inmates and staff also reported that the initiative results in a safer environment because good inmate behavior is a requirement for participation.² Once they are placed in the program, inmates can be removed from the faith- and character-based settings if they commit a single serious infraction of prison rules.

Department reports show that inmates in prison-wide faith- and character-based programs have lower rates of disciplinary reports than comparable inmates. During the period January 1, 2009, through June 30, 2009, the Lawtey, Hillsborough, and Wakulla Correctional Institutions, which operate prison-wide programs, had lower rates of disciplinary reports per 1,000 inmates than comparable inmates in other institutions. Specifically, inmates in Lawtey Correctional Institution had a disciplinary report rate 9% lower than inmates

¹ In May 2009, Glades Correctional Institution began operating as the fourth faith-based institution in the Florida correctional system. Because it was a newly established program location, we did not include this institution in our analysis.

² Inmates must have received no disciplinary reports that resulted in disciplinary confinement during the previous 90 days.

from comparable institutions, while the disciplinary report rates at the Hillsborough and Wakulla Correctional Institutions were 68% and 49% lower, respectively.³ The department's data did not provide detail on the severity of the violations that generated the disciplinary reports; however, the lower report rate suggests that inmates participating in the initiative may pose a less significant threat to prison safety than inmates in other institutions.

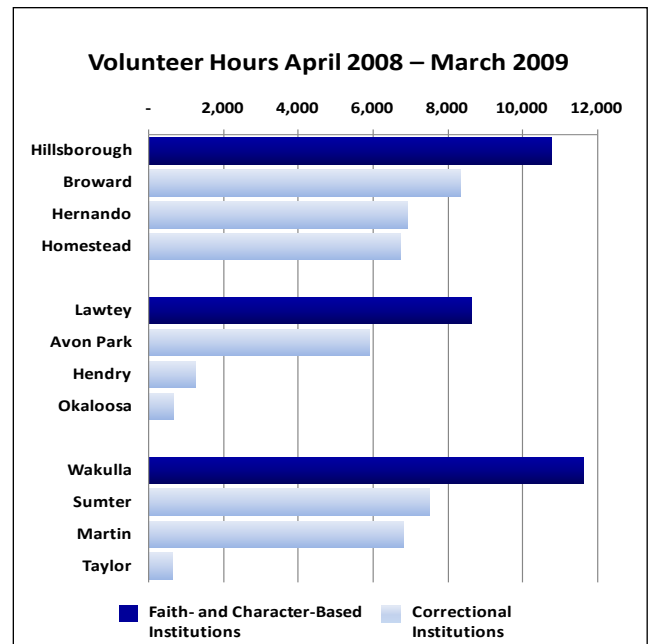
In addition, facilities with prison-wide programs have lower incidents of the discovery of identified contraband than similar prisons that do not offer these programs. During 2008, the faith- and character-based prisons had fewer incidences of weapon seizures and fewer positive inmate drug tests than comparable prisons. This positive outcome occurred despite the fact that the prisons offering the initiative programs had significantly more volunteers visiting the facilities than the comparison prisons and thus more opportunity for the introduction of contraband. For example, the Wakulla Correctional Institution, which operates a prison-wide program, had two weapons seized during the year, while a similar institution (Taylor Correctional Institution) had 14 weapon seizures. Similarly, the faith- and character-based Lawtey Correctional Institution had six inmates test positive for drugs in 2008, while Avon Park Correctional Institution, which does not have a prison-wide program, had 16 positive inmate drug tests.⁴

The prison-wide programs have generated increased volunteerism. The initiative has generated a substantial increase in the number of volunteer hours donated to prison programs. As part of the initiative, the Legislature directed the department to increase the number of volunteers who minister to inmates from various faith-based institutions. The department invited

both secular and religious charitable organizations to mentor inmates and offer programming designed to effect an inner transformation of inmates. This outreach effort has been successful in increasing volunteer hours in participating prisons. For example, before the faith- and character-based program was implemented, Hillsborough Correctional Institution averaged 220 volunteer hours per month. Since the program was implemented, Hillsborough has averaged 796 hours volunteer hours per month; an increase of 262%.

During the period April 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009, the three prison-wide programs operating at that time had significantly higher numbers of volunteer hours per inmate compared to similar traditional institutions. For example, as shown in Exhibit 2, Lawtey Correctional Institution had 8,624 volunteer hours while Hendry Correctional Institution had 1,230 volunteer hours.

Exhibit 2
Faith- and Character-Based Institutions Have Higher Volunteerism Than Comparable Institutions



Source: OPPAGA analysis.

³ We were unable to compare disciplinary report rates for the faith-based self-improvement dorms because the department does not separate disciplinary report data by housing unit within prisons.

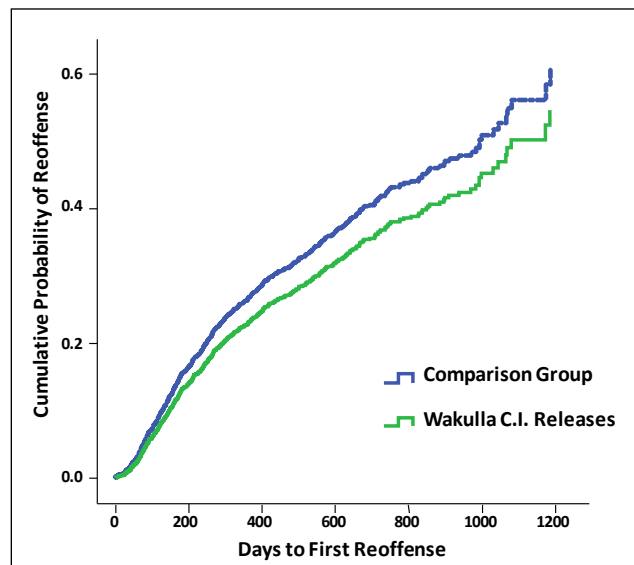
⁴ We were unable to compare incidence of contraband for the faith-based self-improvement dorms because this information is reported at the institution level and a dorm-level comparison was not possible.

This outcome is valuable given current economic conditions in which government resources are limited. Between April 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, DOC’s three institution-based programs generated 31,000 volunteer hours, the equivalent of 15 full-time employees hours representing a value to the state of over \$550,000.⁵

Inmates served in prison-wide programs are less likely to reoffend. Inmates released from the faith- and character-based institutions have shown somewhat better post-release outcomes. OPPAGA analyzed department recidivism data and found that inmates who participated in the prison-wide programs had a slightly longer “time to failure” than comparable inmates who were on the waiting list for the programs. That is, inmates served by the program, on average, were in the community without committing new offenses longer than comparable inmates (see Appendix A for more details on the methodology).

As shown in Exhibit 3, inmates released from the Wakulla Correctional Institution program were, on average, 15% less likely to have reoffended than comparable inmates who did not participate in the faith- and character-based initiative. The post-release benefits were weaker for the other two prison-wide programs—inmates served by the initiative at the Hillsborough Correctional Institution were 5% less likely to reoffend while those served at the Lawtey Correctional Institution were 6% less likely to reoffend than comparable inmates who did not participate in the initiative.

Exhibit 3
Wakulla Inmates Were 15% Less Likely to Reoffend Than Comparable Inmates



Source: OPPAGA analysis.

Our data analysis found that participation in the dorm-based programs had no measurable effect on post-release recidivism outcomes. Nonetheless, inmates in both the institution- and dorm-based programs generally state that the initiative has improved their prospects of a successful re-entry through constructive self reflection and plans to join a church or other faith-based organization as part of their re-entry plan.

These findings are consistent with those reported by the Urban Institute.⁶ Using a different statistical technique and definition of recidivism, the Urban Institute found that at six months after release, inmates served at Lawtey Correctional Institution had lower reincarceration rates than a matched comparison group, but this effect essentially disappeared after 12 months following release. The Urban Institute found no statistically significant differences between inmates at Hillsborough

⁵ The number of employees is calculated based on 2,080 hours annually per full-time employee. The value of 31,000 volunteer hours is calculated at \$17.78 per hour which is the average 2007 hourly earnings for Florida nonsupervisory workers based on data from Independent Sector, a forum for nonprofits, foundations, and corporate giving programs.

⁶ *Evaluation of Florida’s Faith- and Character-Based Institutions*, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, October 2007.

Correctional Institution and a matched comparison group.⁷

It is unclear from our analysis why prison-wide programs have better recidivism success than dorm-based programs. Faith- and character-based programs are relatively new nationwide and there is little solid empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing recidivism. While there appear to be potential benefits to faith- and character-based programming in state and federal correctional systems, additional research is needed to identify what factors contribute to program success. Additional research also is needed to examine the efficacy of specific program curricula and models and to determine what mix of programming generates the greatest improvement in recidivism.

What challenges has Florida's faith- and character-based prison initiative encountered?

The initiative has faced two primary challenges—providing religious diversity in its dorm-based programs, and avoiding underutilization of program dorms.

Some dorm-based programs have challenges maintaining religious diversity. The faith- and character-based dorm programs are small enclave communities within larger prisons. These programs provide a more intensive experience than the prison-wide programs, and operate as a therapeutic community where participants are to develop strong bonds and hold each other accountable to meeting program requirements.

Some of the dorm-based programs have experienced difficulty in maintaining diversity in their religious programming, which is constitutionally mandated. For example, the faith-based dorm at Union Correctional

Institution currently partners with one church to deliver its faith- and character-based program. The volunteer coordinator and all volunteers are members of this church and the programming reflects the church's teachings. The department indicated that it needs to better monitor volunteers at this institution to ensure that volunteers are not attempting to convert inmates to a specific faith and that it needs to make greater efforts to bring in volunteers of other faiths. In contrast to the prison-wide programs which offer a wide variety of programs, non-Christian participants in some dorm-based programs have few religious program choices other than attending the non-Christian services that are open to all prison inmates in the institution's chapel.

Some dorm-based programs are underutilized. Due in part to the configuration of some prisons offering faith- and character-based dorms, some of these units are underutilized. Each correctional facility is assigned a profile of inmates to serve, defined by the gender, age, and custody grade of the inmates it houses. This profile, along with statutory requirements governing the initiative and institutional and inmate management considerations, can limit the department's ability to place inmates in the faith- and character-based dorms.

Union Correctional Institution serves maximum security inmates over the age of 50, and has not fully utilized its faith- and character-based dorm program. This is in part due to the provision of s. 944.803(3), *Florida Statutes*, which requires at least 80% of inmates participating in the dorm-based program to be within 36 months of release. There are relatively few inmates over the age of 50 who are serving relatively short sentences in Florida's prison population. Department staff indicate that it is difficult to assign enough inmates to the program to fill all available beds.⁸ Staff at the prison stated that if

⁷ The Urban Institute did not study the Wakulla Correctional Institution because at the time of the study it had not been operational long enough to have had sufficient releases to analyze.

⁸ Section 944.803(3), *F.S.*, is unclear as to whether this requirement applies to each dorm location or the program as a whole. Department legal staff stated that applying the requirement to the program as a whole would be a reasonable interpretation and would allow for greater participation by long-term inmates in some locations to be off set at others.

the law were modified to allow more than 20% of dorm residents to have more than 36 months remaining on their sentence, the program could consistently maintain full utilization.

Lancaster Correctional Institution, which serves medium security youthful offenders, 18-24 years old, also has experienced underutilization of its dorm program. In order to qualify for reimbursements from the National Child Nutrition Program, some Lancaster dorms house only inmates less than 21 years of age.⁹ Other dorms including the faith- and character-based dorm, serve only inmates age 21 years and over. However, there are relatively few inmates on the program's waiting list that fit the narrow facility profile at Lancaster (male, youthful offender, medium security level or lower). To reduce the number of empty beds in the dorm, the department has placed inmates in the faith- and character-based dorm who are not participating in the initiative's programming. The presence of non-participants within the program may undermine its therapeutic and rehabilitative goals and discourage open communication and full compliance among program participants. Program staff asserted that it would be easier to consistently maintain full utilization if the dorm were allowed to serve inmates age 18 years and older.

Recommendations

To improve the initiative's effectiveness in reducing recidivism, the department should monitor emerging research on other faith- and character-based correctional initiatives and adopt best practices and evidence-based models as they become established and can provide demonstrated results.

To ensure the constitutionality of the faith- and character-based initiative and full utilization of all dorm-based program beds, we recommend that the Department of Corrections require

volunteer coordinators and chaplains to regularly report to central office chaplaincy their strategies for ensuring that dorm program composition meets the religious needs of all dorm-based program participants.

To achieve higher utilization of the faith- and character-based dorms, we recommend that the Legislature amend s. 944.803(3), *Florida Statutes*, to authorize the department to serve more than 20% of inmates with more than 36 months left on their sentence in faith- and character-based dorms. Alternately, the Legislature could clarify that the department could meet the statutory requirement by adjusting the population at other dorm-based program locations so that overall the program has at least 80% of inmates within 36 months of release. We also recommend that the department modify its eligibility criteria for the dorm-based program at Lancaster Correctional Institution to admit the full youthful offender age range of 18 to 24 years.

Agency Response

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Corrections for his review and response.

The Secretary's written response has been reproduced in Appendix B.

⁹ Residential institutions that house both children and adults are eligible to participate in the National Child Nutrition Program when the institution has a distinct or separate area for the care of children. In an institution, a child is defined as a person less than 21 years of age.

Appendix A

Methodology – Comparing Faith-Based Institution and Dorm Outcomes

To assess the outcomes of the Department of Correction's Faith- and Character-Based Program, we compared the recidivism rates of four groups of offenders:

- inmates released from a faith- and character-based institution;
- a comparison group composed of inmates released from prison who had been on the waiting list for a faith- and character-based institution but were not placed in the institution;
- inmates who completed a faith- and character-based dorm program; and
- a comparison group composed of inmates on the waiting list for placement in a faith- and character-based dorm program who were not placed in the program and also were not placed in a work release center, work camp, forestry camp, or road prison prior to their release from prison.

Data. The Department of Corrections provided data on these inmates' demographics, criminal histories, disciplinary referrals, and subsequent offenses.

Study population. We examined data on 1,293 inmates who were released from a faith- and character-based institution after the initiative had been operating in the prison for at least six months. We examined data for all released inmates from these institutions through December 2008, including 231 inmates from Hillsborough Correctional Institution, 635 from Lawley Correctional Institution, and 427 inmates released from Wakulla Correctional Institution.

Our comparison group consisted of 2,283 inmates who requested transfer to a faith- and character-based institution but were not placed in one of the institutions before their release from prison.

We examined data on 1,311 inmates who had completed a faith- and character-based dorm program as of December 2008. It generally takes about 12 months for inmates to complete these programs, and we analyzed all released inmates who had completed a dorm program through December 2008. The group comprised inmates from seven institutions, including 287 inmates from Everglades Correctional Institution, 245 inmates from Gulf Correctional Institution, 51 from Lancaster Correctional Institution, 42 from Lowell Correctional Institution, 343 from Polk Correctional Institution, 286 from Tomoka Correctional Institution, and 57 inmates from Union Correctional Institution.

Our comparison group consisted of 9,988 inmates who requested a transfer to a faith- and character-based dorm program but who were not placed in these programs before their release from prison, and also did not participate in other re-entry programming including work release, work camps, forestry camps or road prisons.

Method of analysis. Using Cox regression, we estimated the risk of inmates in the institution and dorm groups recidivating relative to that of inmates in their respective comparison groups. This technique calculates the probability of reoffending after release from prison,

given the number of days an inmate has been released. For the inmates’ recidivism date we used the earliest of three dates; the date of first subsequent offense, arrest, or re-incarceration. Inmates in the institution group were followed for a maximum of five years after release. Inmates in the dorm group were followed a maximum of eight years. The dorm programs have been operating longer than prison-wide programs. The Cox regression allowed us to control for differences between the treatment and comparison groups on factors related to recidivism including age, race, gender, severity of worst prior offense, disciplinary referral rate, and custody level.

Statistical results. We found a modest positive effect in recidivism outcomes when comparing inmates from Wakulla Correctional Institution to the wait list comparison group. The risk of recidivating for Wakulla inmates relative to the wait list counterparts was 0.85. This relative risk of 0.85 means that inmates released from Wakulla were 15% less likely to reoffend than similar inmates on the wait list. We found less of an effect for the faith- and character-based correctional institutions of Lawtey (0.94 or 6% less likely to reoffend) and Hillsborough (0.95 or 5% less likely to reoffend). We found no substantive differences in recidivism for the inmates in the faith- and character-based dorm programs compared to their counterparts on the wait lists when controlling for factors related to recidivism.

Exhibit 1

The Risk of Inmates from Hillsborough, Lawtey, and Wakulla Recidivating Was Lower Relative to a Selected Comparison Group of Inmates from Other Facilities

Facility	Relative Risk of Reoffending	Number of Inmates
Dorms	1.03	1,311
Hillsborough	0.95	231
Lawtey	0.94	635
Wakulla	0.85	427

Note: These results are based on the entire population of cases. Accordingly, inferential analyses using p-values and confidence intervals were not appropriate and our analysis addressed the magnitude of the differences between treatment and control groups for both the faith- and character-based institutions and the dorms.

Appendix B



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of CORRECTIONS

An Equal Opportunity Employer

2601 Blair Stone Road • Tallahassee, FL 32399-2500
Phone: (850) 488-7480

Governor
CHARLIE CRIST

Secretary
WALTER A. McNEIL

<http://www.dc.state.fl.us>
Fax: (850) 922-2848

October 22, 2009

Gary VanLandingham
Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
& Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475

Dear Mr. VanLandingham,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to OPPAGA's report on the Department of Corrections' Faith and Character-Based Prison Initiative. I am pleased and agree with your assessment that both the prison-wide and dorm-based programs have demonstrated a positive effect on inmate institutional adjustment and institutional security and that all three prison-wide programs studied have had a positive effect on reducing the likelihood that inmates will reoffend. This is truly remarkable when you consider that the initiative's programs are volunteer-staffed, inmate participation is on a voluntary basis, and no state funds are expended on these programs.

Your specific findings of positive outcomes can be seen as a tribute to our staff that manage and implement this initiative on a daily basis. These findings can also give hope to inmates that want to improve themselves and succeed in prison and after release. These specific findings are that inmates participating in prison-wide programs (*when compared to comparable inmates*) had lower disciplinary rates, fewer incidences of weapons seizures, fewer positive drug tests, and were less likely to re-offend, while facilities offering these programs have a much higher level of volunteerism (*compared to previous levels at each prison-wide program and to comparable facilities selected by OPPAGA staff*).

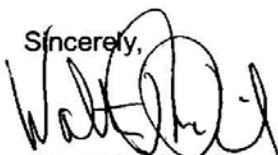
I was glad to see that the two primary challenges (*maintaining religious diversity and underutilization*) facing this initiative were limited to the dorm-based programs. I suspect that the 'smaller-scale nature' of the dorm-based programs is our biggest problem in facing these challenges. However, as seen in the following responses to your recommendations, the department will take the steps necessary to address these challenges.

Gary VanLandingham, OPPAGA | Faith and Character-Based Prison Initiative
Page 2
October 22, 2009

I was also very encouraged to see that none of the three program-specific recommendations dealt with the prison-wide programs which further highlights our success in implementing them.

Finally, I want to thank you for the professional and courteous manner in which you and your staff conducted this review. As usual, they were a pleasure to work with. Responses to the recommendations contained in your report are shown on the following attachment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter A. McNeil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "W" and "M".

Walter A. McNeil
Secretary

Gary VanLandingham, OPPAGA | Faith and Character-Based Prison Initiative
Page 2
October 21, 2009

Department of Corrections

Office of Re-Entry

Responses to OPPAGA Recommendations

Office of Re-Entry responses to the recommendations contained in the OPPAGA report are shown below.

Recommendation 1 – To improve the initiative’s effectiveness in reducing recidivism, the department should monitor emerging research on other faith- and character-based correctional initiatives and adopt best practices and evidence-based models as they become established and can provide demonstrated results.

Office of Re-Entry Response – We concur and will comply. To monitor emerging research and demonstrated results for faith- and character-based correctional initiatives, the department will task Chaplaincy Services and the Bureau of Research and Data Analysis with the responsibility to continually conduct an applicable literature review. When they determine a specific practice that fits the department’s model, has promising results, and can be applied at no cost to taxpayers, they will present it to the Office of Re-Entry for their implementation consideration.

Recommendation 2 – To ensure the constitutionality of the faith- and character-based initiative and full utilization of all dorm-based program beds, we recommend that the Department of Corrections require volunteer coordinators and chaplains to regularly report to central office chaplaincy their strategies for ensuring that dorm program composition meets the religious needs of all dorm based-program participants.

Office of Re-Entry Response - The constitutionality of the faith and character-based initiatives are of critical concern to the Department. It is due to the procedural prudence and balanced approach of the department that these programs have successfully operated in full public purview but without First Amendment litigation. That said, this recommendation is duly noted and will result in appropriate adjustments. Such adjustments can be illustrated by the actions already taken at and planned for Union CI, to include:

1. Monthly meetings between the Chaplain and the volunteer coordinator. They have been having these informal meetings for some time. Future meetings will address operational issues, curriculum, volunteer recruitment, and inmate participation;
2. Secondly, the Chaplain will be required to submit a monthly report to the Central Office Chaplaincy Services Administrator. This report will include inmate attendance, curriculum with annotation, volunteer recruitment (efforts and goals) and operational issues; and
3. Finally, the Chaplain will initiate a more formal continuing education for the current volunteers. The constitutionality of the program depends in part on a

Gary VanLandingham, OPPAGA | Faith and Character-Based Prison Initiative
Page 2
October 21, 2009

well-trained volunteer team. These intentional training sessions will explain procedures, review precautions, and respond to current issues.

The Chaplain has been making a sincere effort to recruit additional volunteers to the Faith- and Character-Based dorm program at Union Correctional Institution. He has scheduled two additional programs from sources other than the 'one church' mentioned above. He is in the process of adding two volunteers who are fluent in Spanish. He is continuing this effort with the express intent of creating a more diverse program.

Recommendation 3 – To achieve higher utilization of the faith- and character-based dorms, we recommend that the Legislature amend s.944.803(3), *Florida Statutes*, to authorize the department to serve more than 20% of inmates with more than 36 months left on their sentence in faith- and character-based dorms. Alternately, the Legislature could clarify that the department could meet the statutory requirement by adjusting the population at other dorm-based program locations so that overall the program has at least 80% of inmates within 36 months of release.

Office of Re-Entry Response – Concerning the first option offered in Recommendation 3, given that our faith- and character-based programs are a key part of the department-wide Re-Entry Initiative, we would ask that the Legislature not amend the referenced statute. A key part of the Re-Entry Initiative is the evidence-based, best practice of maximizing program resources to provide needed programs for those inmates that are within 36 months of release. To be authorized to serve more than 20% of inmates with more than 36 months left on their sentence in faith- and character-based dorms would go against our Re-Entry efforts to comply with best-practice and the overall aim of having Re-Entry services succeed by providing timely, excellent programs that help inmates succeed.

Concerning the second option offered in this recommendation, given the latest data available, the Legislature may not need to clarify departmental requirements in this regard. Since 6/3/2008, the Bureau of Research and Data Analysis has prepared a bi-weekly report for Classification that breaks down these percentages by dorm and statewide. Data from the latest report (as of 10/2/2009) show that statewide 89.9% of all inmates housed in dorm programs had less than 36 months left before release. Plus, six of the seven dorm programs were well over the 80% threshold, with the remaining dorm program at 79.5% (virtual compliance). So, whether one applies the 80% standard to each dorm or statewide, the department's monitoring efforts have paid off and show that a minor adjustment is needed at only one facility to bring us into compliance for each individual dorm and that statewide we far exceed the current legislative requirement.

Recommendation 4 – We also recommend that the department modify its eligibility criteria for the dorm-based program at Lancaster Correctional Institution to admit the full youthful offender age range of 18 to 24 years.

Gary VanLandingham, OPPAGA | Faith and Character-Based Prison Initiative
Page 2
October 21, 2009

Office of Re-Entry Response – Since this recommendation could effect federal requirements for and dollars from the National Child Nutrition Program (NCNP), as well as local facility options in terms of inmate management, the department will need to further review how it could comply with this recommendation. Leadership within the Office of Re-Entry, Chaplaincy Services, and the executive leadership team at Lancaster CI will need to be consulted to determine the best option.

One promising option would be to change the age-range for this dorm program from 21-24 to 18-20. This would keep Lancaster CI compliant with the NCNP eligibility criteria that require a distinct or separate area for the care of 'children' (in an institution, a child is defined as a person less than 21 years of age). Also, with only 37 beds in this dorm, this change in age-range could go a long way to ensure full utilization of the dorm (since under-utilization has been a problem given the existing age-range of 21-24). This would in turn eliminate the need to place non-participants in this faith-based dorm to ensure full utilization.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



OPPAGA provides performance and accountability information about Florida government in several ways.

- Reports deliver program evaluation, policy analysis, and Sunset reviews of state programs to assist the Legislature in overseeing government operations, developing policy choices, and making Florida government better, faster, and cheaper.
- PolicyCasts, short narrated slide presentations, provide bottom-line briefings of findings and recommendations for select reports.
- The online internet encyclopedia, www.oppaga.state.fl.us/government, provides descriptive, evaluative, and performance information on more than 200 Florida state government programs.
- The [Florida Monitor Weekly](#), an electronic newsletter, delivers brief announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.
- Visit OPPAGA's website at www.oppaga.state.fl.us

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing evaluative research and objective analyses to promote government accountability and the efficient and effective use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

Project supervised by Marti Harkness (850/487-9233)

Project conducted by Michelle Harrison (850/487-9220) and Jason Gaitanis (850/410-4792)

Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., OPPAGA Director